Oral history with 62 year old male, Argenta, British Columbia (Transcription)

<unintelligible text> ARGENTA, B.C. 1979

INTERVIEWER: Peter Chapman

Begin M29 B(4)

<unintelligible text>: Well, my folks come here about 1910 from Alberta.

MR. CHAPMAN: Your father's name was <unintelligible text>

<unintelligible text>: Yea,<unintelligible text>

MR. CHAPMAN: What was your mother's name?

<unintelligible text>: <unintelligible text> that's translated into English. In the Ukraine, it was Paraskovia, that's her name. Anyway, they came, immigrated from the Ukraine, somewheres in 1900 and their first stopping point was in Ontario. Then they moved to Alberta was next. That was in Vegaville in Alberta. That was a big Ukrainian settlement. And then they had a store there. That clock there on the wall, they bought that second-hand at that time for $5. That clock still runs. It's not going now because it needs a little oil, coal oil or something in there to get it going.

And then my dad was very interested in fruit-growing and he heard about this country. There was a real estate agent from Kaslo, he was advertising. They called him "Honeymoon Harris", that was his name. He had a ranch across from Kaslo, called Honeymoon Ranch. He sold people, like my father, they didn't know any better - they made a down payment just on his word, on property. They figured there was an orchard already bearing fruit and when they come there to see it, it was across from Kaslo, there was nothing there, just rock bluffs.

MR. CHAPMAN: That's not Birchdale?

<unintelligible text>: No, no, that was right across from Kaslo, over in Campbell Bay country, somewhere in there. So then he saw that and he forgot about that and come on up the lake to this end and they really liked it here. Then they had these types of people here too, that were just waiting for suckers, you know, to sell land to. Speculators. My dad and then there were the <unintelligible text>, next to where <unintelligible text> are living and then <unintelligible text> the place <unintelligible text> owns. Now all these people came about the same time and then there were the <unintelligible text> and the <unintelligible text>. <unintelligible text> were here early too. So they all went to farming, for fruit-growing and the <unintelligible text> went for cattle-ranching. They had some money, more than some of the rest of us. So my dad and <unintelligible text> there and <unintelligible text>, they grubbed their ranch out by hand with a mattock and then when they could afford to get a cow and get a calf and they had oxen. Instead of horses, they had oxen to clear land, to plough and haul their provisions from the wharf up the hill. There was no road. If you notice that trail from the school, where the Friends' School is now, there's a trail up the hill on the south side of the creek, well, that was the main route before the road was in.

They packed on their backs everything and then when they got their oxen and then they built the road, they put in more time free of charge so they'd get a road.

MR. CHAPMAN: That wasn't a public road?

<unintelligible text>: Oh, no. They put in a lot of time on their own to get things organized. Then, let's see, when was the first, I can't remember when the school opened. It seems to me it would have to be - <unintelligible text> was the first teacher.

MR. CHAPMAN: He said it was in 1919. He came back from the way and came and taught, something like that.

<unintelligible text>: That would be 1900, somewhere in there. Yeah, because see, I was five years old when I started school and I was born in 1917. That would be 1922 so that would be around....

MR. CHAPMAN: I think he said right after the first war. Is that right?

<unintelligible text>: Yeah, that would be 1914. Yeah, that's about right. He was the first teacher and all the settlers here went together and built the school, bought the lumber and built the school. <unintelligible text> went to teaching. He was going to farm too, but he didn't get to first base. He didn't know nothing about it. So it was my dad who told him he would make a better teacher than a farmer and we needed a teacher to teach the kids. So that's how that happened.

MR. CHAPMAN: Well, education must have been pretty important to people like your dad.

<unintelligible text>: Well, yes, he couldn't speak a word of English. The only English speaking people were the <unintelligible text>. The <unintelligible text> were French.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did you learn Ukrainian at home first?

<unintelligible text>: At home, yeah, I did. My wife and kids have just chewed the hind end right off me for not teaching them. I can speak two languages and I can understand. It would be very easy for me to learn a third or fourth language. But anyway it so happened that I didn't teach my kids as much as I wanted to, because from one thing, there was this discrimination sort of thing. People would laugh, you can't speak English and this sort of thing and that wasn't good.

Anyway, however, I managed, all us kids managed to learn English and we went to school from grade one to grade nine here. I went to grade eight. I was fifteen when I finished school and I went to work.

MR. CHAPMAN: Jack wasn't the only teacher you had?

<unintelligible text> No, there was a lot of teachers. <unintelligible text> here in Lardeau. <unintelligible text> wife. She taught me, when I was in grade eight. Then there was another <unintelligible text>. She taught, real good teachers.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did they all come across from Lardeau on the boat?

<unintelligible text> We had a little school, there was a little school in Johnson's Landing. There was one in Argenta; there was one at Lardeau; there was one at Cooper Creek, there was one at Meadow Creek; there was one at Howser.

MR. CHAPMAN: All one-room school?

<unintelligible text>: All one-room schools and the teachers taught from grade one to nine or eight. Some of them taught to nine here. This rural center, they went to grade nine or ten there. <unintelligible text> taught there.

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MR. CHAPMAN: The school was located where the Friends' School is now?

<unintelligible text>: That's right. I don't know, I still maintain that that little the red school house was the thing.

MR. CHAPMAN: You think you got a good education there?

<unintelligible text>: We got good education. We had as high as fifteen kids, that's a lot at one time in that little school.

MR. CHAPMAN: There were mostly girls, weren't there?

<unintelligible text>: At one time there was all girls but me.

MR. CHAPMAN: That must have been pretty awful.

<unintelligible text>: Well, it was.

MR. CHAPMAN: You had some brothers didn't you?

<unintelligible text>: Yeah, but he was nine years younger. I was pretty near through school.

MR. CHAPMAN: <unintelligible text> had girls?

<unintelligible text>: <unintelligible text> had all girls. The <unintelligible text> boys and girls got old enough but then I was - there was a few years I was the only boy. When recess come, I'd either hike up a tree or at that time, you take a peack of high water in June, this lake from the north and clean down to Creston was just solid wood, same as the Duncan reservoir. Well, soon as recess come, we went out on the driftwood. The bell would ring and here you are, way out there. The fellows, girls and boys both, wore jeans. You could tell that they were in the lake. I was always foxy, I wore wool pants and you couldn't tell whether they were wet or not.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did you get heck if you'd been out in the lake?

<unintelligible text>: You'd get the strap sure. I only got the strap once. Now there was another teacher, <unintelligible text>, taught school in Kaslo but she was our first teacher here. I think probably that was probably her first school, here. I was in grade two at the time she taught. She was the only one, first one and only teacher that ever gave me

the strap. I maintain that - I've told this to so many people - that I figure our grade eight education at the time, our basic, was equivalent to grade twelve today. Because we learnt to read, write, do arithmetic and the whole bit. We had the whole things, art, every Friday in the morning we would have parliamentary debates. We went through the parliamentary system, that was tremendous. We all liked that. Then these debates, about the country kids and the city kids, what was the most advantageous of the two. We always won here.

MR. CHAPMAN: The country kids always won?

<unintelligible text>: Always won.

MR. CHAPMAN: If you had to take the side of the city kids, what would you do

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<unintelligible text>: I wouldn't know, but we were all country kids. But I never got to be a city kid. I always managed to be a country lad so it was easy. It was really, I think back to those days.

MR. CHAPMAN: Your parents, they had been storekeepers and the neighbourhood was Ukrainian in Alberta. So this was a big move to go away from other Ukrainian people.

<unintelligible text>: Yeah, and come here to settle where there was all nationalities There was English and French and everything, Dutch.

MR. CHAPMAN: What about the <unintelligible text>

<unintelligible text>: They were the same. They were Polish. I had two uncles came, followed my dad here and they had, there was five girls and two boys in our family and there was seven boys in one of the other families and seven girls in the other.

MR. CHAPMAN: They came to Argenta?

<unintelligible text>: Yeah.

MR. CHAPMAN: Where did they live?

<unintelligible text>: Up at the <unintelligible text> place, that eight-acre. They lived there. But they weren't here for too long because they were city type of people.

MR. CHAPMAN: Were they <unintelligible text> or what was their name?

<unintelligible text>: We were all <unintelligible text> that's the proper way to say it. But <unintelligible text>, he was the teacher at that time and he had such a hard time to keep us apart. There was three families of the <unintelligible text> so he went to work and changed our name to <unintelligible text>.

MR. CHAPMAN: He did that?

<unintelligible text>: Yeah, <unintelligible text> The proper way is <unintelligible text>. There were the <unintelligible text> girls, they were English. There were the <unintelligible text>, they were French.

MR. CHAPMAN: There was someone named <unintelligible text> or was that maybe earlier on? I've been looking through some old land records. I wondered if there was anyone named <unintelligible text>? There were lots of people that came and went before the war. I thought maybe they were....

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yes, that might have been before my time. I only remember, just go back to what I've heard and then when I was old enough to remember.

MR. CHAPMAN: Well, you were born here, weren't you?

MR. <unintelligible text>: I was born here.

MR. CHAPMAN: You were born in the house behind?

MR. <unintelligible text>: That little log cabin still standing there behind the big house

MR. CHAPMAN: Were you their first child?

MR. <unintelligible text>: No, third last. Four sisters ahead of me and three of us then I come next and then another sister and then a brother.

MR. CHAPMAN: There must have been plenty of work when you were growing up to do around your place?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh, there was. When we got out of school we had to hustle home and get the cows. They were running out on the flats, milk.

MR. CHAPMAN: You just let your cows on free range?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Free range, but we had to go out and get them every night.

MR. CHAPMAN: Bring them home and milk them?

MR. <unintelligible text>: The clearings that we had at home were strictly for hay meadows for making hay and we run the cattle out.

MR. CHAPMAN: What kind?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Mostly Holstein.

MR. CHAPMAN: How many did you have?

MR. <unintelligible text>: We shipped cream to the creamery in Nelson, it was a curlew creamery at that time in Nelson and then Palm Dairies took over. But the boat, you see, would come twice a week, the Moyie or whichever boat it was, Kuskanook or Nasookin. Shipped your cream in five and eight-gallon cream cans.

MR. CHAPMAN: You must have had to have a good chill room to keep that fresh.

MR. <unintelligible text>: We had a system of running cold water, kept them in that.

MR. CHAPMAN: Could you keep enough hay in that barn for your animals, your cows and your oxen?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Well, there was another big hay shed adjoining that but that's been taken down. I remember we had a big hay shed out in the field right at the end of the field. We could grow enough hay and then silage. We had a silo, one of those concrete down in a pit, about ten feet in diameter and twenty feet deep. It took exactly an acre of corn to fill that.

MR. CHAPMAN: Where was your corn field?

MR. <unintelligible text>: We'd plough up an acre every year in a different spot out in the hay field.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did you have irrigation systems?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Water, we had sprinklers and irrigation on the surface, running water. Then we had fruit, cherries, here mostly. Johnson's Landing was apples and cherries. They were mostly fruit. We were the first to have cattle and a dairy herd and then we switched to beef and finally had to end up getting rid of everything.

MR. <unintelligible text>: During the thirties we sold choice steers for five cents a pound. That was in the late thirties.

MR. CHAPMAN: To Kaslo, would they buy them?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Nelson and Kaslo. Baby beef, veal, eight weeks old, somewheres in there, twelve weeks, they went to the butchers in Kaslo. There was two butcher shops, like this one Eric's Meat Market, that's one of them.

MR. CHAPMAN: Still the same one?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Still the same one. Then there was another one I can't remember. That shop was taken down. And then the big critters went to the butcher shops in Nelson.

MR. CHAPMAN: Were there a lot of other people producing around here too?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Yeah, there was.

MR. CHAPMAN: Was that on the flats?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Out on the flats, that's where their range was and all over the hills.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did everyone just let their cows run loose on the flats?

MR. <unintelligible text>: That's right.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did they get mixed up?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Not you, you'd get to know your own. <unintelligible text> had the biggest steer in the whole Kootenay valley at that time. He dressed, when he was butchered, 1600 pounds. He was over a ton on the hoof.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did they keep him for breeding?

MR. <unintelligible text>: No, he was their ox. He could pull a load, that feller. You take a horse that weighs a ton, that's quite a chunk of horse. You take a cow critter that weighs a ton and his horn spread, well, he couldn't get in that....

MR. CHAPMAN: (Six feet.) And he was out in that field? Did you have to watch out for him?

MR. <unintelligible text>: He was quiet, oh yeah. When they were advertising to sell the flats, this man <unintelligible text>, you might have heard of him, he took that steer, he bought him from <unintelligible text>. He took that steer down to Nelson and took him up and down Baker Street, advertising the Argenta flats. He was never on the flats, he was raised on the hill up there, the bench-land.

MR. CHAPMAN: Hanna was going to sell the flats? He owned the hotel, did he? And the flats?

MR. <unintelligible text>: He owned ,<unintelligible text>, and there was others before him. That was really something. There was quite a bit of cattle ranching.

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MR. CHAPMAN: Was <unintelligible text> place that little cabin that's sort of just south of <unintelligible text> potato field? There's a little cabin left there. Was that <unintelligible text> place?

MR. <unintelligible text>: I think it was a chicken house. There was a house but it burnt down.

MR. CHAPMAN: A big house?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yeah and there was big buildings and everything.

MR. CHAPMAN: When did it burn?

MR. <unintelligible text>: That was in the late thirties, no, it would be the early thirties. The second world war was starting in 1939.

MR. CHAPMAN: Do you remember the fire? Was that a big thing?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yeah, you could see it plain.

MR. CHAPMAN: Well, <unintelligible text> was a promotor, wasn't he? Of real estate and mining?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Mining and everything, yeah.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did he live in Argenta or did he just visit?

MR. <unintelligible text>: No, he lived here. He's still got a daughter in Nelson, <unintelligible text>. Real nice lady. They had the bookstore there, then they sold out and they moved to Balfour, I think.

MR. CHAPMAN: That's where they live now.

MR. <unintelligible text>: They had sawmills, there was a mill in Lardeau, one at Cooper Creek and a big one in Gerrard.

MR. CHAPMAN: What was the name of that company? It had something to do with down south, didn't it? The name of it was kind of funny. It had something to do with down near Castlegar, didn't it?

MR. <unintelligible text>: I can't remember. I think Severin was one of them names. But it was a big mill.

MR. CHAPMAN: That was at the rail head up there? Where they sawed all the wood from up around Trout Lake?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Trout Lake and all around up the Lardeau Valley. Logs went up that way and down this way to the mills here.

MR. CHAPMAN: Was that when you were a kid or was that afterwards when you were logging yourself, later?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yeah, later on.

MR. CHAPMAN: But this was before?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Before, this was still when we were still going to school.

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MR. CHAPMAN: Did men from Argenta go work in the woods much?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Yes.

MR. CHAPMAN: Your dad, did he?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Yeah, mostly in the winter time, when it was the off-season fro farming. Dad would go work, so did <unintelligible text>. They worked up at the mill at Gerrard. They would have to stay there for a week and then come back. Then there was the fish hatchery, there's something there. There was a huge mill in Gerrard on one side of the lower end of Trout Lake and a fish hatchery just across the lake and bark and wood and sawdust and smoke and fish. That's where we're kind of mixed up today.

Fish and Wildlife, they figure that wood is a bad thing in the lake for the fish. As far as I'm concerned, from being here all my life and seeing what took place, for all these 60 years. Summers, you know, you couldn't see the sun for two months, the smoke.

MR. cHAPMAN: Was that from slash fires?

MR. <unintelligible text>: No, forest fires. They never did any slash-burning. The only burning that was done was fires that got away from farmers. That's what burnt the hills here. From say, like, Salisbury to Clint Creek, that whole country, that was a fire got away from a farmer.

MR. CHAPMAN: Who was clearing then?

MR. <unintelligible text>: I forget whose fire that was but it was one of the settlers. And then these real estate guys, they got busy and started lighting fires to beat the band, to bring the bush off, so they'd have some open land.

MR. CHAPMAN: They didn't just leave a mess after the fire?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Well, it burnt clean. But you see, then Mother Nature - Forestr didn't plant no trees. This hill between Argenta Creek and Clint Creek, it burnt clean.

MR. CHAPMAN: Was that when you can remember this?

MR. <unintelligible text>: I can remember that one.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did it threaten the houses at all?

MR. <unintelligible text>: It did, certainly it did. It started right here in the bottom lands. They managed to keep the homes. They couldn't fight it, they had to let it go.

MR. CHAPMAN: How old were you when that happened?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Four or five, somewhere in there.

MR. CHAPMAN: So you don't remember much about it. But it left a big scar for awhile?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yeah. Then Mother Nature replanted but it's so thick, that whole hill. I don't know if you've been up there. You got to pin your ears back to get through, it's that thick.

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MR. CHAPMAN: Well, where did it burn? I'm curious.

MR. <unintelligible text>: Where did it start? It started there at the eight-acres, there at Pollards. And then it burnt in all directions.

MR. CHAPMAN: I've always wondered about all this birch and down by <unintelligible text>, it looks like there was a fire through there not too long ago.

MR. <unintelligible text>: A lot of that was probably burnt at a different time.

MR. CHAPMAN: Did <unintelligible text> burn it, try to clear a lot? There's not much of a clearing there.

MR. <unintelligible text>: No, that would be the guy that was there ahead of <unintelligible text>. There was a fire down here at Lost Ledge Creek and that was, that'll be in the late thirties. It burnt from there, a wind come up and by evening that fire was up here at Cooper Creek. And it burned the whole country. It jumped Davis Creek and threaten Lardeau, the village of Lardeau. It goes that fast.

MR. CHAPMAN: So you've been fighting forest fires for a long time.

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yes, I started fighting fire with my dad when I was twelve. I'd go with him. He was patrolman whenever there was a thunderstorm. He'd do up to a certain point up on the mountainside to spot fires.

MR. CHAPMAN: Was that before they had the tower on Lavina?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Oh yeah. They didn't get paid for it. The only pay they'd get was when there was a fire, well, then, he would be foreman on the fire. That still went right up to recently. The honorary fire warden - I call him ornery - honorary fire warden, they called him, he didn't get paid. That was right up to the last couple of years, they had them. You had the authority to hire up to ten men.

MR. CHAPMAN: So there was no forest district at Lardeau then, was there? Things were more on their own up here?

MR. <unintelligible text>: Well, no, there was a ranger office in Kaslo. There was an assistant ranger in Lardeau.

MR. CHAPMAN: Was that <unintelligible text>

MR. <unintelligible text>: Les <unintelligible text> was the first ranger in Lardeau. <unintelligible text> sure, he was ranger in Kaslo but <unintelligible text> was the first forest ranger in Lardeau. Now, you see, they're going back to that.

(End of tape one, side one.)